Letters

Review reviewed

Dear Sir — In your November/December issue on p.885, there was a review of the 10th edition (though not mentioned as such) of my book 'Foundations of wireless and electronics', in the revision of which I was assisted by S.W. Amos. In over 61 years of published writing I do not think I have ever before been impelled to reply to a review. As this book has become so well known over the last nearly 50 years, it may seem unnecessary to do so. But even those of your readers who are familiar with one or more of the previous editions might well get the impression that this latest one was hastily and carelessly thrown together, and spoilt by numerous errors and obscurities.

Judging from hundreds of previous reviews of my work, I may reasonably claim to be noted for accuracy and clarity, and the people who know me best are the strongest witnesses to the care I invariably take to achieve and maintain that reputation. In this edition, as a double check, Mr. Amos (who is a notable author in his own right) and I sent every chapter to and fro between us, and not a line was passed until we had both considered it carefully.

The reviewer seems to have been determined to find something wrong with a book so universally praised, however trivial, exaggerated or untrue his criticisms.

He would have preferred me to use one of the two clumsy and incorrect descriptions 'monochrome' or 'black and white' to distinguish uncoloured television, instead of the simpler 'plain', because the former are generally accepted. I explained in the book that I *invented* 'plain', having in mind the familiar phrase 'penny plain, twopence coloured'. So it was quite untrue for the reviewer to say I gave the reader to understand that 'plain' was in common use. He objected to 'sender' in place of the longer and less accurate 'transmitter', though 'sender' was preferred by BSI. And he objected to 'd.v.' and 'a.v.' being used as abbreviations, though apparently not to 'd.c.' and 'a.c.'. He dismisses all those of my terms mentioned above as 'quirky terminology'. Would he be able, I wonder, to produce anyone who has genuinely been misled by them? I have always thought it better to lead in correcting bad terminology than to follow the crowd in perpetuating it. If that is quirky, I take it as a compliment.

If he were more careful himself he would have stated the number of pages in the book (551) to a better approximation than 500. Saying that I stated that a reactance stage contained no inductance or capacitance is indeed puzzling if the context — the simulation of a large inductance by an amplifier containing none — is carefully omitted.

Further explanation by the reviewer reveals that what he wrote about 'the muddle of frequency units' boils down to one misprinted letter that got through, out of thousands of errors in the proofs. The other 'evidence' of this particular muddle is that I gave numerical examples (as is my custom) using the appropriate formulae given in alternative units on the facing page. These also illustrate my warning there about the importance of choosing the right formula for the units.

A sample of the 'many more examples' of my 'careless mistakes and obscurities' is that 'p.d.' is an abbreviation of 'potential difference', not of 'difference of potential'.

He also says that Fig. 19.2, with its text, is confusing. If he had read this with reasonable attention he could not have said this, because the criticism is totally unfounded.

And in this review, while remarking on the impressive coverage of this book for beginners, he is disappointed to find nothing on frequency synthesisers! Perhaps that is partly because of his unrealistic idea ('written in 1983') of how long it takes nowadays to revise, set up in type, correct two sets of proofs, two sets of diagrams (hundreds of them), print, bind and issue a technical book. — Yours faithfully,

M.G. SCROGGIE (F)
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8th February 1985

[D.P. Leggatt writes: I'm sorry that Mr. Scroggie is displeased with my review of his book, in particular because I recognise very well his eminence as a writer on electronics matters. In common with thousands of others, I have followed his 'Cathode Ray' articles over the years with great interest and respect, invariably finishing with a better understanding of the particular topic]